

# Celebrate earth day, respect mother nature

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## Body

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Mother Nature has thrown a lot our way these past few weeks.

An icy blast just before Easter coated trees, downed power lines and left more than a million Montreal-area households shivering in the dark.

No sooner had the heat come back on than we were sweating in summer-like temperatures and basking in bright sunshine - as if to make up for her earlier ire. The last of the crusty old snow vanished almost overnight, the grass turned green before our eyes and the flowers burst into bloom.

But as the skies darkened again, the waters rose. The rapid melt-up put Montreal and neighbouring communities upriver on high alert for flooding.

Maybe these wild fluctuations are par for the course in these parts, where spring is less a season than a brief interlude between the end of winter and the beginning of summer. Or maybe they're the warnings of an exasperated Mother Earth, who has been telling us to clean up our act for decades while we pay her little heed.

Earth Day, April 22, is when we are supposed to celebrate nature's awesome power and sometimes cruel beauty. But it should be a reminder of the need to do a better job of appreciating, respecting and above all protecting our environment, which can be as fragile as it is furious.

By now, we ought to know that we are living on an ailing planet. Human-caused climate change is warming the Earth to unsustainable levels. Biodiversity loss is accelerating the damage. Many scientists believe the sixth mass extinction event is underway.

On Earth Day, we will march and plant trees, dim the lights and pick up litter. It's when we go for walks in the woods, which are so good for our physical and mental health, and kids plant seeds to watch the miracle of life springing forth. These symbolic deeds may show our good intentions, but they fall short of the meaningful action required to limit global warming to tolerable levels and preserve the interconnected web of critical ecosystems that are threatened by human activity and economic development.

The steps we must take globally, locally and individually have been mapped out by scientists and international treaties.

Countries have made commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but there is still too much planet-warming carbon and methane being spewed into the atmosphere. Canada has pledged to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, yet we still have the highest rate per capita.

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Just last year, in Montreal, the world agreed to preserve 30 per cent of the Earth's lands and oceans to prevent catastrophic biodiversity loss. Yet Ottawa can't even come up with a plan to conserve the Technoparc Wetlands on mostly federally owned property near Trudeau airport, the largest tract of unspoiled nature left on the island of Montreal and home to more than 200 migratory bird species.

Quebec is keeping tabs on rising floodwaters, yet environmental groups say its new bill governing land use in the province lacks the ambition to meet climate goals or protect crucial wetlands that act as natural buffers from encroachment.

Montreal has banned single use plastic utensils, straws and bags to reduce waste. But too much of the recycling the city collects ends up in landfills because of underperforming equipment or contractors, while plans to open two composting facilities are behind schedule due to construction delays.

We marvel at the butterflies fluttering through our backyards, then we yank all the "weeds" that feed pollinators.

These are just a few examples of things we know we shouldn't be doing, but are, or should be doing, but are not. Or we're taking baby steps in the right direction instead of major strides. All the while, time is running out to save our planet and all the life it sustains from far more extreme threats than an ice storm or spring flooding.

If our mother's temperature was rising so drastically, if her prognosis was so bleak, we'd be at the hospital seeking emergency treatment. But with Mother Earth, we lurch from one crisis to another without connecting the dots, then go back to the bad habits that are killing her.

Perhaps putting things in these metaphorical human terms will help us finally recognize the urgency of the situation and respond in kind. Then again, if all the talk of salvaging a livable future for our children and grandchildren doesn't move us, what will? If we truly care about the birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees, every day should be Earth Day. ahanes@postmedia.com !@COPYRIGHT=© 2023 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

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